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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KMPI](#) [AE](#)  
SUBJECT: PACING THE UAE'S POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Classified by Ambassador Michele Sison, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

REF: ABU DHABI 1687

¶1. (C) Minister of State for Federal National Council (FNC) Affairs Anwar Gargash told a USG delegation (including Ambassador-at-large for Trafficking-in-Persons Lagon, NEA/ARP Director Steinfeld, Ambassador Sison, and Dubai Consul General Sutphin) that political development naturally lagged behind other areas in the UAE. On the social front, for example, the UAE is a highly tolerant society with a well-developed landscape for women's participation; free-market economic success makes the UAE a natural participant in globalization. Cognizant of what is happening in the region, yet "not really under pressure" to boost the pace of political development, the conservative UAE took the initiative of "opening up a bit" with partial elections to the FNC in December, 2006.

¶2. (C) Faced with expanding crises in the region (a "two crisis" Middle East having become a "five crisis" hub), the UAE had chosen the FNC as a place to start opening the political system due to its national profile -- which made it more attractive than a municipal council vote. The FNC already had decades of experience as a functioning institution with roots in the constitution.

¶3. (C) Amid complaints by some that its efforts were superficial -- and by others that it ran the risk of duplicating Kuwait's chaotic political evolution, the UAEG chose electors, considered expanded powers for the FNC, and conducted a national election for the first time in its history. With most of the population initially disinterested in the vote, the UAEG opened the door slightly to political participation. The results of a "technically sound" election process sent a message to decision makers that they should not fear elections (which do not necessarily lead to division or violence), while letting the population know that elections have merit as a governing principle. Gargash's ministry had assembled by-laws to ensure fair and calm elections, in the process "setting a marker" that the UAEG would not be able to walk back in the future. While campaign debates were "amateurish" (generally "too flowery and too long"), the UAE now has a "half semi-elected council" without the chaos or divisiveness witnessed elsewhere.

¶4. (C) The UAE's goal is not democracy per se, said Gargash, but "more institutional channels for representation." In that context the electronically-coordinated vote was a "textbook success." Citizens of the UAE saw an orderly process. While the country's political infrastructure is not ready for full elections, said Gargash, the elections had worked out many bugs in the system (such as residency rules for the various emirates), and set a baseline for taking

further "humble steps" in political development in the future. The UAE's leadership thus took a top-down approach to protecting order while broadening participation; popular demand was not a primary driving force.

15. (U) Ambassador Lagon approved this message. Trafficking-in-Persons aspects of the meeting with Gargash reported reftel.  
SISON